

Claims

[c1] 1. A method to remotely enable software-enabled options comprising the steps of:
receiving a user I.D. at a centralized facility from a user;
receiving an option-enabling request from the user specifying an option requested to be enabled in equipment at a subscribing station;
at the centralized facility, confirming that the option has not already been enabled;
sending an enabling feature from the centralized facility to the equipment in the subscribing station; and
activating the option in the equipment.

[c2] 2. The method of claim 1 wherein the enabling feature is a software key designed to enable software already installed in the equipment.

[c3] 3. The method of claim 1 where the enabling feature is software to run the feature in the equipment.

[c4] 4. The method of claim 1 wherein the equipment includes medical imaging scanners.

[c5] 5. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of designing a software key to enable the option for a predetermined trial period.

[c6] 6. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of authenticating the user I.D. after receiving the user I.D. at the centralized facility.

[c7] 7. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of sending an enabling feature includes downloading the enabling feature to the equipment and remotely enabling the feature automatically and without further user input.

[c8] 8. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of sending an enabling feature to the equipment includes sending the enabling feature by one of FTP and email to a field engineer for manual installation and enablement of the feature.

[c9] 9.The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of:
verifying the option activation; and
sending a verification email to the user confirming option enablement.

[c10] 10.An option-enabling system comprising:
a subscribing station having at least one in-field product and at least one computer programmed to control the in-field product;
an on-line center capable of receiving and authenticating a user I.D., validating an option request, and creating an option key in response thereto;
and
a communications network to relay data from the on-line center to the subscribing station, the communications network including a communications portion in the on-line center and a communications portion in the subscribing station, and further includes an ability to connect the on-line center to the subscribing station through an external communications network and transmit the option key from the on-line center to the subscribing station in response to a user I.D. receipt and authorization, and a valid option request receipt.

[c11] 11.The system of claim 10 further comprising a computer within the on-line center programmed to:
receive a user I.D. at the on-line center from a user and validate the user I.D.;
receive an option request from the user;
if the user I.D. is validated, receive a system I.D. and validate the system I.D.;
if the system I.D. is validated, check whether the option requested was previously enabled; and
if the option requested was not previously enabled, enable the option requested.

[c12] 12.The system of claim 11 wherein the computer is further programmed to generate an option key specific to the system I.D.

[c13] 13.The system of claim 12 wherein the computer is further programmed to:

download and install the option key in medical equipment at the subscribing station; and
verify option enablement in the medical equipment.

[c14] 14.The system of claim 13 wherein the computer is further programmed to send an electronic verification of the option enablement.

[c15] 15.The system of claim 10 wherein the subscribing station includes at least one medical imaging device.

[c16] 16.The system of claim 12 wherein the computer is further programmed to FTP or email the option key to a user identified by the user I.D. to allow the user to manually enable the option.

[c17] 17.The system of claim 12 wherein the computer is further programmed to generate the option key with a disablement feature to disable the option after a predetermined time period.

[c18] 18.A computer program which, when executed by a computer, causes the computer to:
receive an option-enabling request from a user to request an option to be enabled in a medical device located remotely from an on-line center;
receive a system I.D. and validate the system I.D. with data from a database at the on-line center;
compare the option-enabling request with any other option requests for that system I.D. in the database at the on-line center and reject the option-enabling request if the comparison results in a predefined number of matches;
otherwise, generate an option key and forward the option key to one of the user and the medical device to enable the option.

[c19] 19.The computer program of claim 18 wherein the generation of the option key includes creating a disabling feature to disable the option after a predetermined number of days.

[c20] 20.The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer program further causes the computer to receive and authenticate a user I.D. before receiving an option-enabling request.

[c21] 21.The computer program of claim 18 wherein the predefined number of matches is one.

[c22] 22.The computer program of claim 18 stored in memory of and incorporated into an on-line center that is connected to a plurality of subscribing stations, each subscribing station having at least one medical imaging scanner that has operational software that comprises modules, where at least one of the modules is optional and not operational and the option key is generated to automatically enable the at least one optional module.

[c23] 23.A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave and representing a set of instructions which, when executed by at least one processor, causes the at least one processor to enable an option in a device by:
receiving a user I.D. at a centralized facility;
receiving an option-enabling request specifying an option requested to be enabled in the device at a subscribing station;
confirming that the option has not already been enabled; and if not,
sending an enabling feature from the centralized facility to the device in the subscribing station; and
activating the option in the device.

[c24] 24.The computer data signal of claim 23 wherein the enabling feature is a software key designed to enable software already installed in the device.

[c25] 25.The computer data signal of claim 23 wherein the device includes medical imaging scanners and further includes designing a software key to enable the option in the medical image scanner for a predetermined trial period.

[c26] 26.The computer data signal of claim 23 further causing the acts of:
authenticating the user I.D. after receiving the user I.D. at the centralized facility; and

wherein the act of sending an enabling feature includes downloading the enabling feature to the equipment and remotely enabling the feature automatically and without further user input.